

On April 4, 1980, 11 Puerto Rican men and women were taken prisoner in Evanston, Illinois. The media portrayed them as vicious and hardened "terrorists."

But we, a committee of clergy, professors, other professionals and community people, have seen for ourselves another side of the story. Some of us have known individuals among the 11 as colleagues, and have seen them as people-oriented and trustworthy individuals in their everyday work. Others of us came to know these 11 people only after their capture, but have witnessed the stance they have taken before the U.S. courts, and the treatment they have received.

These 11 people have stood before U.S. courts and made no defense, asking instead to be treated as prisoners of war. They have taken this stance of non-recognition of the courts at great personal cost to their own lives, allowing the courts to convict them of anything and to give them the maximum sentences. In spite of a lack of evidence against her, Haydee Beltran Torres stood before the court in New York accused of murder, with a potential death sentence, and she made no defense.

Is this intense commitment and strength an isolated "delusion," as the media would have us believe? If this is a "delusion," it is one which we, the United Nations, and many other international bodies support--the "delusion" that the people of the world have an inalienable right to self-determination and, if necessary, the right to fight for it.

But the media does not portray the other side of the story, which explains the intense and self-sacrificing commitment of these 11 people. The other side of the story is not the story of a few individuals. It is the story of Puerto Rico.

U.N. CONDEMNS COLONIAL STATUS OF PUERTO RICO

Several times, in increasingly strong language, the Decolonization Committee of the U.N. has affirmed the right of the Puerto Rican people to independence and self-determination, free of U.S. interference. In a 1979 report of the Committee, approved by the General Assembly, 129 for, 0 against, 6 abstentions, the U.N. reaffirmed its mandate to the U.S., calling for complete transfer of all powers to the Puerto Rican people, without further delay. Special attention has been given to continuous repression and harassment against all organizations and individuals advocating independence. The case of Puerto Rico is under continuous study by the U.S., since a General Assembly vote in 1973, 104 for, 5 against, and 19 abstentions.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "COLONY"?

Occupation by the U.S. military has been constant in Puerto Rico since 1898, when the U.S. army invaded. The U.S. replaced an independent republic, which the Puerto Rican people had established in 1897, winning freedom after four centuries of Spanish rule. U.S. military presence today is as much an occupation as ever. The U.S. maintains nearly 100,000 military and paramilitary personnel on Puerto Rican soil; they hold 13% of the island's arable land for military bases. On the inhabited island of Vieques, once a prosperous farming and fishing community, 26,000 out of 33,000 acres are held by the U.S. Navy.

Economic dependence on the U.S., and ownership by U.S. interests, has also replaced a once self-sufficient economy. First, a diversified agricultural economy was replaced with a one-crop sugar economy. Later light industry, and now heavy extractive industry and chemical plants are being installed. U.S. financial interests control and benefit from Puerto Rico's dependence. Over 80% of manufacturing, 60% of banking, and 90% of industrial exports are under U.S. control. 81% of those employed in Puerto Rico work for U.S. concerns. The U.S. maintains control over all laws and trade relations affecting Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico now must import almost all its food from the U.S.



FOR THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO, COLONIALISM MEANS:

- * 40% unemployment
- * 1/3 of the people have been displaced and relocated, mainly to the U.S.
- * 75% of the people depend on Food Stamps for survival
- * 40% of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age have been sterilized in government-sponsored programs (Puerto Rican women were also made the objects of early research on birth control pills, before they were considered safe for U.S. women.
- * the highest suicide rate in the Western Hemisphere

FOR THOSE WHO RESIST,

COLONIALISM MEANS BRUTAL REPRESSION; for example:

- * October, 1935, colonial police gunned down 4 Nationalist Party leaders at a rally in Rio Piedras,
- * March, 1937, police operating under direct orders from the U.S. colonial governor opened fire with machine guns on unarmed, peaceful demonstrators at what became known as the Ponce Massacre, leaving 21 dead and 150 wounded,
- * October, 1950, to put down an uprising for independence, the U.S. Air Force strafed and bombed the people of Jayuya and Utuado; U.S. tanks patrolled the streets of Ponce and Mayaguez; and U.S. trained National Guardsmen attacked towns and villages with machine guns. Hundreds were shot, and 3000 were imprisoned.
- * November 10, 1979, Angel Rodriguez Cristobal, a leader in demonstrations against the U.S. Navy's total destruction of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, was hung in an isolation cell at Tallahassee Federal Prison. He was the first to take a stance as a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War, and was serving a six-month sentence.
- * July, 1980, Luis Adorno Maldonado and Jorge Zayas Candal were found shot execution-style in Puerto Rico.

Files released by the FBI under lawsuits against political surveillance reveal every kind of deliberate harassment, infiltration, personal smear tactics, and disruption being used by government agencies against individuals and organizations working for Puerto Rican independence.

Repression has also been part of the laws controlling Puerto Rico. The Jones Act of 1917 imposed U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans so that they could be drafted. But in 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court

ruled that the protection of the U.S. Constitution did not apply to Puerto Ricans. This pattern has been perpetuated ever since, in laws making it a crime even to verbally advocate Puerto Rican independence.



Pictured at a meeting of the Civic Committee to Support the Rights of Puerto Rican Prisoners are, front, left to right: the Rev. Eli Elliot, United Church of Christ minister; Ms. Joan Nicklin, faculty member of Central YMCA Community College, Chicago; Ms. Josefina Rodriguez, mother of Alicia and Ida Luz; back, Rev. S. Michael Yasutake, Episcopal priest-counselor at CYCC, and the Rev. Jose Torres, father of Carlos Alberto.

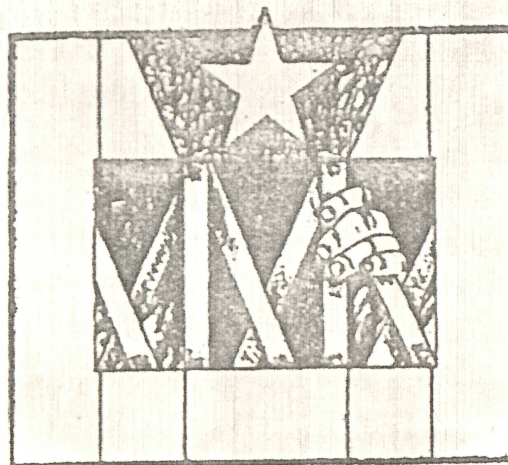
BASIS FOR THE CLAIM OF P.O.W. STATUS

These 11 people are asking to be treated according to international law, as prisoners of war, taking their stand as Puerto Rican independence fighters. They base their claim, in part, on the U.N. General Assembly's Resolution 33/24 of Dec. 8, 1978, which "reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial domination and foreign occupation by all means available, particularly armed struggle." The U.N. demands that all captured anti-colonial freedom fighters be treated as Prisoners of War, not as criminals. The Additional Protocols of the Geneva Accords, adopted in 1977, (which the U.S. was one of the few countries not to sign) also specifically expanded the Geneva Convention to protect anti-colonial freedom fighters, whether or not the colonial power recognizes the army and whether or not the armed combatants are in uniform. The U.N. General Assembly has also recognized that the country perpetuating colonialism has no right to imprison those who fight back. Resolution 33/122, entitled "Protection of persons detained as a result of their struggle against apartheid, racism, and social discrimination, colonialism, aggression and foreign occupa-

tion, and for self-determination, independence, and social progress for their people" demands the release of all individuals detained or imprisoned as a result of these struggles. Historically no distinction has been made between freedom fighters captured in the territory they are fighting for and those captured in the territory of the colonial power.

TREATMENT OF THE 11 PRISONERS

The U.S. government's treatment of the 11 since they were taken prisoner has shown that they are not really regarded as "common criminals," as is officially maintained. Although they were originally charged with offenses for which bail would normally be in the thousands of dollars, bail was set at \$2 million each. Some have been brought to court bound and gagged and even beaten by bailiffs in open court with the assent of the judge. The security requirements for visitors to the 11 have been an exception to usual practice, for some time requiring visitors to have their pictures taken. (The pictures were later used by FBI agents in questioning people in the Puerto Rican community.) While being held in Illinois state prisons, they have difficulty receiving medical attention, and some have been forced to work on jobs which have aggravated their medical conditions. One of the 11 was held in isolation at Pontiac Prison without being charged with any disciplinary offense. Other prisoners at Pontiac passed petitions throughout the prison and agitated to stop his unwarranted isolation and what they described as harassment and intimidation tactics used against him by prison staff.



**THEY ARE
FREEDOM
FIGHTERS
NOT
TERRORISTS**

CHARGE OF "SEDITIONOUS CONSPIRACY"

The Federal charges the 11 faced have added more decades to their sentences. Ten of the prisoners were sentenced from 55 to 90 years in Federal Court, to run consecutive with state sentences. The judge expressed regret that he could not sentence them to execution. The major charge the U.S. government chose is that of "seditious conspiracy," used twice before against Puerto Rican nationalists. By resorting to it, the U.S. government acknowledges that the 11 are not, indeed, "common criminals", but political prisoners, Prisoners of War. U.S. law, however, unlike international law which demands their release, acknowledges freedom fighters with prison sentences. In the U.S. government's own words in the indictment:

"If two or more persons . . . conspire to overthrow, put down, or to destroy by force the Government of the United States, or to levy war against them, or to oppose by force the authority thereof . . . they shall each be fined not more than \$20,000 or imprisoned not more than twenty years, or both."

The charge of "seditious conspiracy" also does not require specific proof of specific actions. It is enough to verbally support an organization advocating what are defined as "seditious actions."

OUR STANCE AS THE CIVIC COMMITTEE

(but what about "violence"?)

As a committee we neither support nor condemn any actions of which these 11 are accused. We do support the claim of these 11 to P.O.W. status and the right to have their case heard before an international tribunal of their peers. We take this stance because we support the right of the people of Puerto Rico to independence and self-determination, in accordance with the inalienable rights recognized by international law.

BUT DO YOU ADVOCATE VIOLENCE?

For us the core question of violence in this case is the violence done to Puerto Rico by continued U.S. control. Members of the Civic Committee come from a variety of positions on how an end to this violence should be achieved, but we agree that it is not for us to decide this for Puerto Rico. Several individuals on the Committee came to this stance out of long-time history as pacifists with a commitment to non-violent activism.

WHAT WE DO

Our two main purposes are:

- *to assure that the 11 be treated as fairly and humanely as possible while confined in prisons in the U.S.,
- *to assure that their status as P.O.W.s be understood and supported by a broad range of the public

We have met on various occasions with prison officials to protest harassment and discriminatory practices against the 11 prisoners. We have been successful on several occasions in gaining some alleviation, but constant vigilance is required. We have also held press conferences, met with TV station officials to protest particularly inflammatory media coverage, sponsored a public tribunal on the case, and presented the case to church and union bodies. Members of the committee also make visits to the prisoners.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- *Join in a list of endorsers of the Civic Committee's stance, recommending that the case of the 11 be heard by an international tribunal.
- *Sponsor an inquiry before members of your organization or church to present the background on Puerto Rico and the case of the 11.
- *Join the Civic Committee . . . the Civic Committee meets every other Monday afternoon at 5:00 PM near the Loop.

For other information please call:

Rev. Jose A. Torres 384-8118 wk, 227-3121 home
Joan Nicklin 984-8233
Rev. Michael Yasutake 984-8328
Rev. Elli Elliott 987-0078

Please send me more information

Name_____

Address_____

I would like to make a contribution for the work. Enclosed find check for \$_____